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ABSTRACT

In response to the need for specialized French language skills among foreign students at France's prestigious engineering school, the Ecole Nationale de Lyon, an intensive language instruction program was developed. The 3-week program precedes the school year so that language immersion and orientation targeted to the particular student group can take place. The course curriculum has been tailored to the school's engineering curriculum and to the kinds of problems foreign students have encountered in the French-language classes. The school and the French Foreign Ministry have provided financial support, and businesses have provided other resources. Ultimately, the costs to foreign institutions for the exchange have been extended to include the language instruction program. Problems encountered in implementing the program include: (1) differing levels of student language proficiency, (2) the school's policy that students do not have to buy textbooks, (3) the intensity of the course, and (4) the short attention span resulting from a heavy emphasis on grammar. Program participation has increased steadily, and the foreign students have found the course to be a valuable part of the year spent at the institution. The program is seen as adaptable to a variety of professional content areas. (MSE)

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INTENSIVE FRENCH INSTRUCTION: A CASE HISTORY IN FRANCE

In: Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages for Business and the Professions.

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In Common Market countries the importance of an international education has been recognized for years. The goal of establishing a "Europe without borders" in 1992 has greatly fostered educational exchanges. The Ecole Centrale de Lyon (hereafter referred to as Centrale) is a school of engineering which the French call a "grande école". This means that admission is based on a highly selective competitive entrance exam that follows two years of special preparation in math and physics. Enrollment is made up of approximately 750 undergraduate students and 100 graduate students of whom 70 are foreign. At Centrale we have capitalized on our international contacts and have established study exchanges with five countries: the U.S.; Great Britain; Germany; Ireland and Indonesia. Through these exchanges we have an additional 25 foreign students enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

At the present time we have seven joint study programs and another two exchange agreements have just been signed. The chart below details the schools these exchanges are with and the number of students involved in them. It also provides a quick overview of the parameters of these exchanges. The reader will note that the Galway and Indonesian exchanges do not work in both directions. At the present time Galway's strength lies in oceanography, a subject that our students have no background in. Centrale's students are several years ahead of the Jakarta students in math and the parameters of this exchange are still being modified.

UNIVERSITY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	LEVEL OF PROGRAM	ADMINISTRATIVE BACKGROUND
CORNELL (USA) 1984	CORNELL - 3 ECL - 4	D.E.A. M. ENG.	Tuition is waived at both schools. Cornell tries to provide research assistantships for all our students and the ECL provides free room in ECL dorms, partly subsidized meal tickets and a monthly stipend of $200 to the Cornell Students
SALFORD (G.B.) 1975	SALFORD - 2 ECL - 2	UNDERGRADUATE MASTER OF SCIENCE	Fees are waived at both Schools. A JSP grant covers other student expenses, e.g. food and lodging. Students are guaranteed lodging in ECL dorms. Faculty exchanges are being envisioned for 1988-1989.
DARMSTADT (W. GERM.) 1968	DARMSTADT - 15 ECL - 10	GRADUATE (D.E.A.) - 3 UNDERGRADUATE - 12	All fees are waived. JSP grants cover other expenses. Students are guaranteed rooms in ECL dorms. This programm involves teacher and researcher exchange, common colloquia and common research projects.
BERLIN (W. GERM.) 1986	BERLIN - 2 ECL - 2	GRADUATE (D.E.A.) - 2 UNDERGRADUATE	Fees are waived at both schools. DAAD funding provides enough coverage to pay for food, lodging in ECL dormitories and some travel expenses.
GALWAY (IRE) 1985	GALWAY - 1 ECL - 0	GRADUATE (D.E.A.)	Fees are waived by the ECL and a JSP grant allows students to cover costs of food and lodging in ECL dormitories.
DJAKARTA (IND) 1986	DJAKARTA - 25 ECL - 0	GRADUATE	The ECL has agreed to take members of the staff of the University of Indonesia and put them in graduate programs (D.E.A., D.E.S.S. or MASTERE) according to their abilities. ECL professors spend one or two weeks lecturing at the U. of I. and help to organize education and research at a post-graduate level in Djakarta. U. of I. pays for its students' expenses.
COLUMBIA (USA) 1988		M. ENG. OR M.S. D.E.A./RESEARCH	
IMPERIAL COLLEGE 4 (G.B.) 1988		MASTER OF SCIENCE D.E.A.	

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The diversity of mathematical background of all the participants has made it difficult to incorporate all the students into the same program. The Salford students take first and second year courses at Centrale and our final year students prepare a Master of Science degree at Salford and receive Centrale's Diplome d'Ingénieur upon successful completion of the Salford M. Sc. degree. The Cornell students prepare a Diplome d'Etudes Approfondies (equivalent to a M.Eng. degree in the States) at Centrale and our final year students prepare either a M. Eng. or a M.S. at Cornell and also upon successful completion of the Cornell program are awarded the Diplome d'Ingénieur from Centrale. The German students take mostly final year courses at Centrale (they must have a Voordiplom to participate in the exchange) and our final year students take advanced courses in Germany which are applied to their Engineering diploma from Centrale.

The influx of foreign students presented many administrative problems but the largest problem by far was the difficulty these students had in integrating our engineering courses which are, of course, taught in French. A variety of linguistic backgrounds and preparation in French that went from no exposure to the language at all to acceptable preparation led to a minimum number of participants in the exchanges. Those who ventured to come often had severe adaptation problems during the first three months of their studies. They were given no special orientation program or advising and were, quite frankly, thrown into the system and expected to adapt.

Students frequently misunderstood instructions, could not correctly formulate questions and found that the French students did not want them on research teams because too much time was lost on explanations.

Furthermore, it was found that foreign students complained of having to do their own lab reports plus those of the exchange students.

Professors complained that the exchange students were not up to par but when pressed for further details, they readily admitted that the major obstacle was the language. It seems that professors could not understand what the students were trying to say on their exams.

In 1985 I was able to persuade the administration of Centrale to allow the creation of an intensive French program that would be held before the school year would begin. This would enable foreign exchange students to participate in a total immersion program in French in order to facilitate their adaptation to engineering courses taught exclusively in French. Moreover, having these students on campus before the arrival of the French students would allow us to give them an orientation session tailored to their special needs.

Centrale's professors were asked to provide information and sample articles on engineering topics to be covered in this course so that the students could gain facility in working with them. Contacts with the students in French gave me an idea of their grammatical deficiencies and their timidness in expressing their wants and needs to teachers.

Armed with this knowledge, I set about creating an intensive internship in French. I chose a three week internship because it was the longest our school calendar could accommodate while still providing a maximum exposure to French without burnout. Experience has proven a three week session to be the most workable solution. Since the school's cafeteria operates on a year round basis to accommodate professors, administrators and researchers, there was no problem in arranging for an additional 25 meals. School administrators agreed to open one floor of one of the school's dormitories for three weeks before the normal school

year begins. Classes take place in the language laboratory and classrooms all situated in the school's library which is also open year-round. This means an economy in cleaning personnel since someone is already assigned to the library and regular classroom buildings and dormitories are not open until the last week of September.

The most difficult task was finding funding for this internship. Our Joint Study Program contracts with the E.E.C. did not provide for language reinforcement classes. It seemed that the financial burden of this internship would fall on Centrale. There were several administrative problems encountered in seeking funding from the school's general operating budget. French, not a language taught in the curriculum of the language department, could not benefit from budget allocations made to this department. Since the rest of the school's courses are engineering oriented, there was no possibility there to cover French instruction. The only area which gave us any flexibility was the International Relations budget. The administration agreed to use part of this budget to cover the salary for two teachers each handling 45 hours of classroom instruction.

An appeal was made to the Ministère des Relations Extérieures to help us set this internship up financially. It was pointed out that Centrale's student exchanges enhanced France's position with other nations and that linguistic deficiencies are a barrier to the further development of these exchanges. The Ministry graciously accorded us a 10,000 F grant for language instruction.

In 1986 the internship was inaugurated on a shoe-string budget. The Ministry's grant partially funded teacher salaries. Centrale covered the rest of the teacher salaries and loaned support materials

which were therefore limited in scope (the language lab had no language tapes in French and the library had no French grammar texts).

In 1987 the Ministry renewed its grant but warned that this would be the final year of its support. Private businesses were contacted and they provided free blank cassettes, video recordings and even reams of paper to run off work sheets. Centrale continued to fill in the funding gaps.

This year the Joint Study Program of the E.E.C. has been converted into the Erasmus Program. For the first time in the history of E.E.C. sponsored exchange programs allowance is made for language reinforcement instruction in host institutions. Our contracts with the Universities of Berlin, Darmstadt and Salford will now almost entirely cover the costs of the participation of their students in the language internship.

The internship is organized around 90 hours of language instruction representing 30 hours per 5 day week. The six hours of instruction each day are divided into two 3 hour periods with an hour's break for lunch. I use this hour to have the students eat, meet and discuss with members of the faculty who will be their teachers or their research advisors. In that way by the time classes start, students already know a good number of faculty members and administrative support staff.

One of the major difficulties encountered in the pedagogical set up of this internship is the fact that the students have several different levels of French. On the whole I have found that the German students have the best background in French and are highly motivated to better their fluency because they can obtain one or two month internships in French industry at the end of their school year in France. They have fewer adaptation problems to classes entirely in French. The British, Irish and American students have had less exposure to French since it is

not an integral part of their engineering course of study. The Indonesians, together with occasional Chinese or Indian researchers who sit in on the classes, have even greater obstacles to overcome. First of all they are not from Western cultures and secondly, they have had little or no formal French language instruction. I have had to arrange for individual tutoring for these participants. Centrale's students who are candidates for the following year's study abroad offer to volunteer tutoring hours in French grammar and conversation.

In an effort to homogenize the entrance level of French we ask all students requesting to participate in the exchange to take a French conversation course at their university during the semester before they come to Centrale. This year for the first time the disparity in levels was not so great and I was able to bring all 25 participants to a common, higher level of fluency by the end on the third week of instruction.

Another problem encountered is the school's policy that students not be required to buy textbooks. In spite of my pleas that the internship be exempted from this rule, no special status was accorded. Therefore all support material must be made up by the teacher and either written on the board or xeroxed (hence the importance of the donations of reams of paper from private industry). Most of the students bring French grammar books written in German or in English with them when they come to Centrale. Although all the students speak English fluently, they are forbidden to use English as a common language in order to teach them to learn to think in French.

The following chart is a sample 30 hour week. The reader will note that each day is divided into two parts - 3 hours of grammar reinforcement and 3 hours of conversation and oral comprehension.

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9 am 10 am	DICTATION - 20 min. Correction - 20 min. Correction of Friday's homework exercises. 20 min.	Corrections of written summary handed in on Monday - 20 min. Dictation on equations 20 min. Correction 20 min.	Dictation 20 min. Correction 20 min. Correction of Tuesday's take home grammar exercices.	Corrections of written summary handed in on Wednesday . 20 min. Improvisational sketches 40 min.	Dictation 20 min. Correction 20 min. Correction of homework on the negative construction 20 min.
10 am 11 am	Review of Past Tense and agreements. Work sheets in class.60 min.	Improvisational sketches 60 min.	Review of the Imperfect/ Past Tense. Work sheets in class. 80 min.	Read part of a scientific article and guess at the conclusion. Then read the conclusion together.60 min	Review of the Subjunctive. Work sheets in class 60 min.
11 am 12 am	Laboratory exercises	Laboratory- oral/aural comprehension.	Laboratory exercises	Laboratory oral comprehension.	Laboratory exercises
H	Exercises in the Past Tense.	Written summary	Exercises in the Imperfect Past Tense.	Written summary	Exercises in the Subjunctive

LUNCH BREAK

1 pm 2 pm	Corrections of written summary handed in on Friday - 20 min. physical descriptions of people and objects. 40 min.	Dictation - 20 min. Correction - 20 min. Correction of homework on the Past Tense - 20 min.	Corrections of written summary handed in on Tuesday - 20 min. Dialogues to be constitued from a series of cartoons 40 min.	Dictation - 20 min. Correction - 20 min. Correction of homework on the Imperfect/Past Tense 20 min.	Corrections of written summary handed in on Thursday's - 20 min. Improvisational sket ches 40 min.
2 pm 3 pm	Improvisational sketches	Review of reflexives and agreements. Work sheets in class.	Improvisational sketches	Review of negation Work sheets in class	Oral presentations of a scientific article (5X12 min.)
3 pm 4 pm	Laboratory- oral/aural comprehension.	Laboratory exercises	Laboratory- oral/aural comprehension	Laboratory exercises	Laboratory - oral comprehension
H	Written summary	Exercises on reflexives	Written summary	Exercises on negation	Written summary

In the grammar part the opening dictation always is a review of the previous lesson's grammar point and serves as its reinforcement. Twenty minutes is devoted to the dictation (a reading of the text, then its dictation and finally a rereading) and twenty minutes to the correction of the sentences the students have put on the board. An additional twenty minutes are spent orally correcting the previous night's homework of written exercises on the grammar point covered that day in class. These elements constitute the first hour of class.

The second hour is composed of a review of a new grammar point which the students have been asked to revise before class and of fill in the blank sentences using the grammar just reviewed.

The final hour is devoted to laboratory exercises where the students hear part of a sentence and must complete it using the grammar they have been working on for the past hour.

Together with an hour's worth of written homework on the day's grammar point, each student spends 3 hours every day on a new grammar lesson and 40 minutes on the former one (the day's dictation).

This is a very intensive rythmn and students find it hard to adjust to during the first few days. The teacher must be careful not to slow down the pace when the students begin to show signs of fatigue. Instead greatly varying the kinds of exercises often helps liven things up. It must be remembered that these students are highly motivated to undertake this internship and that holding the standards high helps them to reach them with greater respect for their own achievements.

Another problem is that such a heavy emphasis on grammar can lead to a short attention span. This can be forestalled by giving the students practical contexts in which this particular grammar point is needed. I try to build the grammar exercises around the improvisation

sketches and this has the added advantage of giving them set phrases to work with.

The oral comprehension and conversation part of the day begins with a 20 minute discussion of the corrections of the summaries of scientific articles the students have turned in the previous day. Then forty minutes to an hour is spent on role-playing sketches. Here students are given some basic sentences and asked to improvise a sketch in a situation in which they will find themselves (at the Préfecture where they must get residency papers or in a classroom where they must ask a question or explain an answer to a professor).

This is an occasion for the students to relax while still learning. This exercise is clearly aimed at helping the foreign student's insertion in the society around him. The teacher must provide vocabulary when needed in order to ensure that only French is being used. Students are fined one Franc each time they are heard speaking another language. The money collected pays for a party the night of the last class.

The last hour of this part of the day is devoted to aural comprehension. Students are shown a videocassette recording of the previous night's newscast and asked to summarize it. Attention is drawn to details they miss and cultural phenomena are explained. The students are then given a scientific article to summarize for homework.

At the end of this intensive internship students feel more comfortable in their French environment and adapt quite easily to their scientific courses which they begin two days later. They are by no means completely fluent but are quite capable of total comprehension of an engineering lecture and can make themselves understood when questioning specific points.

Once they are enrolled in engineering course Centrale offers these foreign exchange students a 2 hour a week follow-up course in technical report writing in French. This is designed to help the students compose lab reports and their end of the year project mini-thesis.

Participation in our exchange programs has steadily increased over the past two years and student evaluations of the year spent at Centrale have pointed out the important role the intensive internship has played in this. Next year's pre-enrollment figures point to a 50% increase over participation in 1986. This has greatly enhanced our international reputation as a host school. In fact, requests are now being received to permit exchange program advisors to participate in the intensive program.

Although this internship is designed for engineering students, the principles can easily be adapted for business and professional students once the parameters of their respective needs are determined. The grammar lessons would remain the same and the conversation lessons and written homework could be redirected to other orientations.

Intensive language training is a tool that educators will be called upon to use more and more frequently in the coming years. We must learn to respond to the needs of our students. This means determining what they will need their language acquisition for and setting up a program that will best prepare them to face a future that is more and more international in scope. Centrale's young but highly successful experiment in intensive French instruction for foreign engineering students is proof that by being attentive to their needs, we can help our students more efficiently respond to instruction in a foreign language.

Régine Lambrech